



Convention on the Rights of the Child

States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

States Parties shall:

- (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;*
 - (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;*
 - (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present.*
- (Article 32)*

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights . . . (Article 13)

The Right to Protection Labour and the Girl Child

The International Labour Organization (ILO), estimates that 211 million children worldwide between age five and fourteen engage in some form of illegal, hazardous, or exploitative child labour. More than half of these are girls. Some 120 million children work full time, every day, all year round. This number includes the many children whose work does not show up in government statistics. The ILO estimates that 95% of the children who work are employed in the informal sector.

Child labour is most prevalent in the agricultural sector, where children are widely used as day labourers. Working long hours, children working in agriculture are often exposed to harmful pesticides, dangerous machinery, backbreaking loads, and many other hazardous conditions. They are also found working in the commercial sex industry, domestic servitude, mining, pyrotechnics production, and in many other harmful activities. Some children are also engaged in armed groups as child soldiers, messengers, porters, cooks, or sexual slaves.

The vast majority of working girls perform jobs that are hidden, unvalued and uncounted. They are found among the tens of millions of girls who work as child domestics in the homes of other families and among the millions more who perform household or farm chores for their own families. Some assist their families in home-based work for wages, such as embroidering, basket making or gem polishing.

The "invisible" nature of this work causes this vast and painful situation to remain unaddressed. These girls are restricted in mobility, confined largely to the domestic sphere, frequently work hours that are twice as long as boys, and comprise the majority of the "very young" workers of the world. These situations have a deleterious effect on their growth, development and health and most seriously affect the ability of the child to pursue an education.

The need exists to identify, examine and expose the common myths or "excuses" that prevent us from moving forward to ensure justice and equality for girls, particularly in the area of economic exploitation.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work. (Section L6)

A World Fit for Children

Promote innovative programmes that encourage schools and communities to search more actively for children who have dropped out or are excluded from school and from learning, especially girls and working children, children with special needs and children with disabilities, and help them enroll, attend, and successfully complete their education, involving governments as well as families, communities and non-governmental organizations as partners in the educational process. Special measures should be put in place to prevent and reduce drop out due to, inter alia, entry into employment. (40, 2)

MDGS

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development. In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth.

WGG Labour Group

Roberta Ross
Int. Council of Jewish Women
Hourig Babikian
Christian Children's Fund
Mercedes Roman
Maryknoll

More Information

Working Group on Girls
NGO Committee on UNICEF
UNICEF House, Room 1142
New York, New York 10017
wggs@girlsrights.org
www.girlsrights.org

Facts to Consider

- The work performed by girls has a high economic value but remains unmeasured and unvalued in the gross domestic product. Yet girls often perform valuable child rearing and home maintenance tasks and free one or both parents for more remunerative work. Some may also produce goods for market which add to the family income but also serves to depress wages paid, even to adults, for such work.
- Domestic service, generally performed by girls, can be among the most exploitative and intolerable forms of child labour. Many girls involved in domestic service earn no wages but merely work for a very meager keep. Even if employers would permit girls to go to school, the school would need to be structured to accommodate their work schedules.
- Burdens that strain a girl's mental and physical capacity violate her right to a healthy development and prevent her from making her maximum potential contribution to society.

Actions to Ensure Girls' Rights

- Societies need to be made aware of the contribution of girls' labour and the waste of their potential that early exploitation and resultant lack of education cause.
- Caring people must work to document the hidden work of girls and the traditional thinking that undervalues it and fails to recognize the danger to the young worker.
- Communities and nations must work to support families and create economic alternatives that will make it possible for the girl to be given her right to self-development.
- Methods must be developed to document the number of children who are not in school. The reason for their failure to attend school should be analyzed and steps should be taken, by law and by community services to prevent the exploitation of these children.
- The amount and type of home-based work of all types should be recorded and regulated.
- The community-at-large, women, and especially girls should be consulted in the development of instruments to assess the above situations.

Source and Resources

Girls at Work, UNICEF, NY, 1998, **A New Tool to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labour**, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 1999.

